PRESS RELEASE

USS Pueblo

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SGT CHICCA OF THE PUEBLO

By Ron Grover
Chief Journalist, USN

A 25-year-old Marine who served only 20 days aboard the USS Pueblo before the ship was seized in international waters off the coast of North Korea has emerged as one of the crew's most active members.

Sgt. Robert J. Chicca is the volunteer Secretary for the USS Pueblo Alumni Association. Through hard, steady work he has laid the groundwork so that he will be able to maintain contact with each member of the crew in the years to come.

He has also accepted the responsibility of helping to answer some 900 letters the crew has received since their release. He helped design the ring each member of the crew will wear. The ring is gold with an aquamarine stone in a "pumburst" cut pattern. One side of the ring has the ship's seal with the date of commissioning underneath. The other has a bull (depicting the ship's theme song THE LONELY BULL) charging across North Korea with two pendants above listing the crew's detention dates.

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One would not think the quiet mannered young Marine would have spare time to do much else. But he is working on the final touches of a painting of Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, USS Pueblo Commanding Officer. The painting is not amateur in its impact. It portrays the commander with deep feeling. It is good.

Sgt. Chicca paints for leisure, but only when he wants to express intense feelings. He has no desire to pursue art for art's sake. Earlier subjects reveal this. He has completed paintings of former Presidents Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy.

Cmdr. Bucher is spoken of by the sergeant with much respect. He refers to the commander as "...one of the family. A man who loved his ship and its crew, and who is totally a sailor."

Sgt. Chicca is proud to be a member of the Pueblo crew. He said the crew never lost faith in their country while in detention in North Korea.

"It was disturbing to see how the communists used the strife going on back home to their advantage," he said. "But yet the crew understood what the North Koreans were trying to do and that the strife back home was all part of our way of life."

He said, "No matter what (they) did we saw through it. They see like a horse with blinders. They can only do what they are told to do."

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Sgt. Chicca said the crew was able to maintain close bonds during their detention and kept up their morale. "This was because of our broad outlook," he said, "and our ability to see things from all sides."

He explained that like manyyoung people he didn't want to listen before he entered the service. "What I learned about our country since is tempered with experience," he said. "Our detention in North Korea changed my life for the better and gave me an awareness of what is going on in the world. I learned a lot about Communism--why we fight it--first hand you might say."

He offered the following comments for young people:

--"Be thankful you have the right to learn the truth about your country.

--"Stay in school. Learn, and learn to enjoy learning."

American ingenuity slipped through the security screening in one of the letters Sgt. Chicca's wife, Ann, sent to him while he was in detention. The sergeant knew their expected child Christmas. He proudly explained that Ann sent him their male name, Jaime, listed with the names of their three dogs. "and the North Koreans didn't know it," he said. He knew it was a boy because he and Ann had already selected a name for a boy and a girl before he left Japan.

Sgt. Chicca is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Edward A. L. Chicca of 702 Somerset Place, Chillum Terrace, Maryland. His wife is the former Ann M. Frisina, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John V. Frisina of Alexandria, Virginia.

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He is the eldest of five children. His only sister is, the youngest in the family, Ann Marie, 7. He maintained average grades at John Carroll High School in Washington, D.C., where he had graduated in 1966. After attending the University of Maryland at College Park for one year he enlisted in the Marine Corps.

It was during recruit training at Parris Island, South Carolina and Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Sgt. Chicca recalled, that his interests broadened and he decided he wanted to do the best he could.

Sgt. Chicca plans to return to the University of Maryland after his release from active duty within the next year. He has asked to be sent to Maryland for duty after the Court of Inquiry is completed. He would continue his off-duty studies which have already given him enough credits for a Junior status.